

Snider Buildings
2400-2402-2402 1/2 Sarah Street
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5200

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SNIDER BUILDINGS

HABS No. PA-5200

LOCATION: 2400/2402/2402½ Sarah Street.
16th Ward (Southside) City of Pittsburgh, Pa.
(formerly the Borough of East Birmingham; originally
"Ormsby's Villa"). In the Office of the Recorder of
Deeds, County Office this property is described as
Block No. 12-L, Lot No. 291. All Deeds and Mortgages
referred to in this text are in this Office.

PRESENT OWNERS: Felipe and Salome Gutierrez
1509 Bingham Street
Pittsburgh, Pa. 15203
Phone (412) 481-0124

PRESENT OCCUPANTS:

1. 2400 (1st. Floor) - Sophie Szafranski (no phone)
2. 2400 (2nd. Floor) - Ronald & Helen DeMarzo - 431-5268
3. 2400½ (2nd Floor) - Philip & Lynn O'Mahoney- 481-9755
4. 2402 - Linda Mellon - 431-2679
5. 2402 - Charles Burns - 381-5278
6. 2402½ (1st. Floor) - Shirley Price - 381-6401
7. 2402½ (3rd. Floor) - Roy Abbott - (no phone)

PRESENT USE: The buildings are subdivided into seven or eight marginal
or sub-marginal "Apartments".

SIGNIFICANCE: The structures are a survival of the period when the street
was dominated by buildings built at the exact property lines
on Main and Cross Streets. They demonstrate the manner in
which structures visually defined the shape and existence
of the street circulation pattern. This pattern has been
repeated in the North Side, West End, Soho, Lawrenceville,
etc. Apparently it was typical in the "Golden Triangle",
the main business district of Pittsburgh, prior to the sky-
scraper era and the pattern still dominates the areas
named above.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

- (1) Dates of erection: 1860-1871
- (2) Architect: Unknown
- (3) Original and subsequent Owners:
 - a) Nicholas Snider
 - b) Mary Snider et al.
 - c) Felipe and Annie Gutierrez
 - d) Felipe and Salome Gutierrez
- (4) Bidder, Contractor, Supplies: Unknown.
- (5) Original plans and construction: Unknown.
- (6) Alterations and Additions: Many and diverse. On June 13, 1952 the Bureau of Building Inspection issued a Permit No. 22402 to Felipe Gutierrez to repair a Kitchen Floor. This is the only permit on record. (This situation is not unusual, many records of the Building Inspection Bureau were destroyed by fire during the period when "old" records were stored in a warehouse on the North Side).

B. Historical Context:

The Snider Buildings at the corner of Sarah Street and 24th Street (originally Caroline) are extremely hard to date accurately. We have concluded that they were built between 1860 and 1871. We will explain the reason for our conclusion during the course of this narrative.

1. The original large tract of land, 354 acres + allowances, of which this is a small portion was originally warranted to John Ormsby by Thomas and Richard Penn and surveyed June 27, 1769 on Order #41. The site was then in the County of Cumberland. (The original warrant stated that the Commonwealth was entitled to 1/5th of the gold and silver discovered on the site "to be delivered at the Pitt Head.)".
2. On the 23rd day July, 1804 John Ormsby "gentlemen" sold 200 acres plus 6% for roads, part of a tract called "Ormsby's Villa" to his son Oliver Ormsby "merchant". This was not recorded until January 17, 1806, some 18 months later. This Deed is recorded in Book N Page 321, at the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny Co., Pa.

3. John Ormsby died "intestate" and for some strange reason, unknown to the title searchers, Oliver Ormsby procured a patent for "self and in-trust" on a "warrant to accept" what was apparently this same portion of "Ormsby Villa". This is recorded at the Pennsylvania Department of the Interior, Harrisburg, Pa., Vol. H-9, Page 385.
4. Upon Oliver Ormsby's death in 1840 his Will was probated in Orphan's Court of Allegheny County No. 32 of the March term of 1841. By the terms of that Will, his daughter Sidney received among other bequests, a portion of the lot described.
5. At some undetermined date, Sidney married John H. Page. On December 30, 1847 Charles S. Bradford sold an additional piece of land to Sidney Page. This was recorded December 30, 1847 in Deed Book 4F, Vol. 69, Page 395.
6. On the twenty-sixth day of January, 1860, John H. Page and his wife Sidney "of the Borough of East Birmingham" sold to Nicholas H. Snider a portion of land described as follows: Beginning on the Southerly side of Sarah Street easterly Fifty Feet (50 ft) and seven and one-eight (7-1/8) inches to a lot sold by Deed of the same date to John Crawford, thence, by a line of said lot and parallel with Third Street one hundred and twenty feet (120 ft.) to a twenty-four foot alley, thence by the line of said alley westerly thirty four (34) feet and four (4) inches to Caroline Street and thence by the line of the said street one hundred twenty-one (121) feet and one (1) inch to the place of beginning at Sarah St. The Deed was recorded in Volume 142, Page 456 in the Registry of Deeds, Allegheny County.

The price of the land was eight hundred dollars. Apparently half of this was paid cash and the rest was in the form of a mortgage by Nicholas Snider to the Pages. This mortgage is recorded in Mortgage Book 37, Page 408 covering 1860. Mr. Snider satisfied this mortgage by 1871.

TO THIS POINT THERE ARE NO REMARKS
ABOUT BUILDINGS IN ANY DOCUMENTS.

7. On December 27, 1871, John H. Snider procured a mortgage from Dollar Savings Bank for \$2,000.00. This is recorded in Mortgage Book 131, Page 289. The Mortgage States:
ON WHICH IS ERECTED THREE (3) 2 STORY BUILDINGS".
There is no record of an Architect or Builder.

8. The earliest Plat Book in the Recorder of Deeds Office and the Department of Surveys of the City of Pittsburgh is dated 1872. On this survey the Building at Larkin Way (sold out to John & Eva Kwiatkowski, 8-17-37 and now or formerly the property of Andrew R. Neidbalski) is shown plus the building presently numbered 2402-2402½. The building numbered 2400 is not shown although it is described in the mortgage above. The information for the survey of 1872 was probably collected and drawn in the previous several years. We can say with sound misgivings that the building at 2402-2402½ was built shortly after 1860 and that the building at 2400 was built about 1870.
9. Nicholas Snider died in 1906 leaving the property to John, George, Mary, and eleven others. In 1936-37 several or all of the other heirs transferred their interest to Mary Snider.
10. On August 17, 1937 the building on the corner of Larkin Way and 24th Street, formerly Caroline, plus a lot 50.45 x 34.36 x 50x41.12 was sold to John & Eva Kwiatkowski leaving the two joined buildings at the Sarah Street side of the original property, with a balance of 50.59 x 70 x 41.12 x 70.63.
11. Mary Snider died on February 20, 1939. The property remained in her Estate (Will Book 240, Page 529) until July 29, 1941.
12. On July 29, 1941, the property was purchased by Felipe Gutierrez and his wife Annie. This is recorded on Vol. 2683 Page 714 at the Recorder of Deeds Office.
13. On June 26, 1970 the Owners listing (same volume and page) was changed to Felipe Gutierrez and his wife Salome.

The structure at 2400 Sarah Street was originally constructed to be a store. An examination of the front reveals that there was a pier about 16 inches wide at both sides and apparently some type of lintel spanning an opening which contained both the original front door (next to the corner of 24th Street) and a display window. The old metal sign with its frame is still in place across this opening. It has been painted out to match the brickwork above and below it. At some time a drop was constructed in front of the building on Sarah Street and a two leaf metal door was installed to permit deliveries to the basement which must have been the storage room for the store.

The store door and window were removed at an unknown date (probably about 1960) and the entire opening was closed with a brick panel into which a new residential window and door were constructed. The original brickwork has been painted repeatedly. The last coat is maroon - much darker than any brick color.

At some other unknown date an addition was added to the rear, one story high with a double-pitched roof. This was a wood stud and joist addition with 6" ship lap siding, painted yellow at present with one window on the street and a door labelled "2400". The roof has been covered with "mule-hide" which has been cemented to the neighboring wall with liberal applications of roofing tar (no counter flashing). The addition has a 2x2 brick chimney about 12 feet high topped by an octagonal clay chimney pot.

Since the date when it was converted from a store this building at 2402-2402½ have been remodelled by the addition of interior partitions into eight flee-bag apartments.

In its historical context both buildings were apparently built for income-producing structures and been allowed to deteriorate without much regard for the surrounding neighborhood.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

During, before, and after the buildings were constructed, property Owners in all the older areas of the City constructed their houses and stores with their front walls exactly on the front property lines. Side walls were built exactly to side lot lines which were typically (in Pittsburgh) twenty-five feet apart. All the outdoor area of the lot was in the rear, devoted to vegetable gardens, flower borders, a fruit tree or two, a grape arbor with a brick paving and an outdoor "privie". If the building was on a corner there were windows on one side wall toward the cross street. If the Owner needed a larger house he added a wing on the rear 14 or 15 feet wide containing one or more rooms on each floor strung out like railroad cars.

In order to prevent the awkward proportions which would result from the narrow width and excess height (plus a cost factor of masonry versus roofing) buildings were often built with a Mansard roof sloping back gently from a heavy gutter and fascia mould. This was typically covered with slate shingles over diagonal wood sheathing and building paper. The shingles were generally laid to form some type of pattern, for instance, horizontal straight rows alternating with fish-scale half-octagons, etc.

The Mansard was carried up to form a low parapet and capped with shaped sheet metal. Behind the parapet was a standing seam roof with a very low pitch dropping to a working gutter at the rear (low) edge.

The third floor was lighted and ventilated by dormer windows on the street side or sides and the rear had typical windows in a brick wall similar to those on the first and second floors.

Stoops and steps were built out into the sidewalk area with a fine and free disregard for the fact that public land was being used. The same thing was true of the cornices and gutters.

This pair of buildings fit the typical description above perfectly. They firmly establish the corner by an unbroken brick mass to the corner and then by the Mansard slope soften the transformation to sky. The basic "wall" character of the fronts strongly defines the transition from "inside" to "outside", from "Public" to "Private". This results in a severe baseline where, in the days of original paving vertical brick of the walls met horizontal brick of the side walks. The severity of Mansard coping is broken by the small scale playful breaks of the Dormers and the occasional tree in a planting pocket in the sidewalk.

2. Condition of Fabric:

The present condition of the fabric is deplorable. Settlement cracks are apparent in the side walls and the corner pier has moved west opening up a large crack where the new panel was toothed in. The entire surface of the brick has been repeatedly painted. Whether this was to cover up the dirt or stop water absorption by an extremely soft brick with a lime and sand mortar is impossible to determine.

The wood fascia gutter has deteriorated. Water has penetrated from above and from the front face which has not been painted in years. Slates are broken and missing from the Mansard. The wood framing around the dormers is rotting from lack of maintenance and so are the brackets below the gutter. The roof has apparently leaked in the past and the entire roof has been repaired with "mule-hide" which hangs out over the cornice at various places.

The chimneys need to be pointed. From exposure to heat and weather, the joints are deeply eroded, bricks are missing, chimney pots are cracked or missing (in one case replaced with a sheet metal scoop).

The grounds are a health hazard. Old overstuffed furniture plus junk plus bagged garbage litter the south yard against the wood fence, which itself is in a ruinous condition.

B. Description on Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

From the corner of Sarah and 24th to the East, the building 50.08 feet then approximately 34.0 feet South, then approximately 46.0 + feet to 24th Street and then 34.60 North to the point of beginning. The foregoing dimensions define the main 2-1/2 story building. On 24th Street there is a relatively recent one story addition 19.20 x 19.30 feet clad in wood siding. At the East side of the property in the rear there is a 2 story brick addition, 20.30 feet North and South by 14.0 feet East and West.

2. Foundations:

Foundations are of field stone, rough dressed laid in a sand-lime mortars. These are not visible above grade.

3. Walls of the main building mass are brick to the second floor ceiling line. At this point there is a wooden box gutter and heavy wood cornice. Above this to the top of the building is a Mansard roof faced with slate laid in patterned rows.

The one story addition is faced with wood siding.

The two story addition is brick to the roof line with a brick dentil course at the gutter line.

4. Structural Systems, Framing.

The structural system is of wood joists, running east and west and bearing on solid masonry walls. The one-story addition is wood joists and wood rafters bearing on wood stud walls. The two story addition is framed with wood joists running east-west bearing on solid masonry walls.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

There are no porches, balconies, nor bulkheads. At four locations on the front there are concrete steps, one step high. Three of these are at present entrances and the fourth is left over from the days when the structure at 2400 had a "Mom-Pop" grocery store within.

6. Chimneys:

The one-story addition has a low brick chimney at the center of the south elevation. The two story addition has a chimney which is flush with south wall, adjacent to the property line. The chimneys for the main structure are concealed in the building fabric. From a distance, only the clay chimney pots are visible.

7. Openings:

a) Doorways & Doors.

At 2400 the original door was removed when the store front was closed in. A new low doorway was created and a modern flush panel birch door with an 18"x18" glass vision panel installed.

At 2402 the original door and frame are in place. There are plain undecorated wood jambs rising to a shallow hood supported by carved wood brackets and covered with a tin roof. There is a glass transom over the door. The door itself may be original. It has two short panels below the lock rail and two taller panels above with semi-circular tops. The panels are slightly recessed with raised moulding.

The doorway at 2402½ is original and resembles that at 2402 with the exception that the total height is about 16" to 18" lower. The door has been replaced with a modern flush-panel birch door with 5 glazed panels in a cross shape.

None of the other doors in the rear and on 24th Street are original.

b) Windows and shutters:

There are no shutters.

In the "new" brick panel on Sarah Street at the first floor, the Owner has installed a modern, aluminum framed picture window with operating side panels. In the right side of the center dormer at 2402, the Owner has partially closed the dormer and installed a single steel outswinging casement.

All other windows are probably original. The lintels and sills are wood, in very bad shape. In most cases, the sill has been covered with sheet metal and at the dormer windows new plinth blocks have been installed. The windows are all double -hung and in deplorable condition.

8. Roofs:

a) Shape Covering:

The roof of the one story addition is double pitched and covered with "mule-hide". The ridge slopes downward from the original building to the chimney.

The roof of the two story addition is a single pitched shed roof with its high point on the property line, sloping downward steeply to the courtyard side. It is covered with asphalt shingles.

The main roof was probably originally metal covered although this is impossible to check without destructive investigation. It has been covered apparently with mule-hide or a built up membrane. There is a parapet all around. The drainage was originally probably internal. At present the owner has cut ragged holes in the parapet and installed some half dozen scuppers and downspouts to the main gutter. The downspouts are patched into holes in the slate with huge gobs of tar and the metal has been coated in red-lead in sharp contrast to the slate Mansard.

b) Cornice, Eaves:

The cornice and eaves have been described above.

c) Dormers, Cupolas, Towers:

There are no cupolas nor towers. There are three dormers front, three rear and one on 24th Street. Each dormer has a pair of double hung windows and a wood hood covered with metal, painted with red lead.

C. Description of Interior:

(1) Floor Plans:

- a) See enclosed drawings.

(2) Stairways:

- a) Totally enclosed, narrow, wood treads & risers, wall-mounted modern rails on one side.

(3) Flooring:

- a) Originally wood throughout the old building. Concrete slab on grade in the addition. Now extensively covered with linoleum.

(4) Walls and ceiling finish:

- a) Original finishes were wood lath and plaster on the ceilings. The exterior walls were originally plastered directly on the masonry. The exterior wall finish has been penetrated by moisture. There are many patches and the present, relatively recent paint is peeling.
- b) Many later partitions have been constructed. Depending on the period, they include wood lath and plaster, gypsum wall board and textured plywood.

(5) Openings and Doors:

- a) The only original doors seem to be those on the staircases. There are 4 and 5 panel doors with the existing trim. The majority of doors are modern, flush doors. Many of the doors have been removed and new "ranch" trim installed.
- b) Windows:
The majority of trim has been replaced by modern trim.

(6) Decorative features and trim:

- a) These have been touched on above.

(7) Hardware:

- a) With the exception of several stairway doors, the hardware is not original. All the old mortice locks have been removed and replaced by modern cylinders for instance.

(8) Mechanical Equipment:

- a) Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:
Heating is exclusively by gas fired space heaters, vented into the flues of the old chimneys. Originally the heating was by coal grates in open fireplaces which have been closed up with masonry and plaster.
- b) There never was any air conditioning. Ventilation is completely by the double-hung windows, aided today by window fans.
- c) Plumbing:
All plumbing has been extensively revised. The original houses undoubtedly had outdoor "privies". Modern bathrooms have been carved out of the interior spaces and modern fixtures installed. In a majority of cases all or most of the piping is exposed.

D. Site:

(1) General setting and orientation.

- a) The buildings face on Sarah Street so the entrances are almost exactly true North. The West side is solid brick against an adjoining building. The yard for all three addresses is in the rear.

(2) Historic Landscape Design:

- a) No Trace.

(3) Outbuildings:

- a) None existing.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

There probably never were any other than the Contractor's Sketches.

B. Early Views:

There are none available that we have been able to find.

C. Interviews:

None

D. Bibliography:

The only bibliography on the site and those sources mentioned above: Records of Deeds and Indentures, Warrants and Patents: Wills and Mortgages.

E. Likely Sources not yet investigated.

The only likely sources not yet investigated are:

The Hillman Library

The Historical Society

The Pennsylvania Room of Carnegie Institute

F. Supplemental Material:

None

(We have worked with the advise of Mr. John A. Martine, an Architect registered in Pennsylvania. Mr. Martine's office is approximately 2½ squares from the Snider Buildings and he has successfully performed some beautiful restorations of buildings in the neighborhood. We are agreed that the trim, details, etc. on the interior are so changed and so untypical of the original building that they give absolutely no impression of the original interiors).

PREPARED BY:

Paul C. Apostolou
Architect
Paul Charles Apostolou & Associates
Architects & Planners

July 26, 1982

PART IV PROJECT INFORMATION:

The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh intends to construct a high-rise residence on the site plus the two adjoining properties. 30 of the Apartments will be in the old "Main" Building of the Morse School. The Housing Authority intends to demolish the buildings at 2400, 2402, 2402½, 2404 and the "Annex" to the Morse School. On that site the Housing Authority will buildg an additional 40 Apartments.

